

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9991
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 2013

EXDIS

LONDON FOR SAUNDERS

PARIS FOR MOOSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, AG, MO, MR, SS
SUBJ: MAURITANIA AND THE SAHARA WAR

SUMMARY : MAURITANIAN COUP D'ETAT AND SUBSEQUENT DIPLOMATIC
ACTIVITY HAVE CREATED ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH , FOR FIRST TIME
IN TWO YEARS, THERE APPEARS TO BE REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SERIOUS
DISCUSSIONS ON ENDING SAHARA WAR. POSITIONS OF PARTIES TO CON-
FLICT REMAIN FAR APART, AND NEGOTIATIONS, IF THEY BEGIN, WILL
IN ALL PROBABILITY BE LONG AND DIFFICULT. IN TG H SITUATION,
UNITED STATES SHOULD NOT SEEK TO PLAY ANY SORT OF MEDIATORY ROLE.
IT WOULD NEVERTHELESS BE IN OUR INTEREST TO EXPLORE ALGERIAN AND
MOROCCAN POSITIONS, TO NOTE APPARENTLY SINCERE MAURITANIAN INTEREST IN

PEACE, AND PERHAPS TO MENTION OUR HOPE THAT NEGOTIATIONS COULD START
SOON. END SUMMARY.

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1. AS THE DUST OF THE MAURITANIAN COUP D'ETAT BEGINS TO
SETTLE, WE SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
VIS A VIS MAURITANIA AND THE SAHARA SITUATION.

2. THE NEW MAURITANIAN REGIME HAS DONE ALL IT CAN, BOTH PUB-
LICLY AND PRIVATELY, TO INDICATE A WILLINGNESS TO END THE WAR.

PRESIDENT OULD SALECK'S CLEAR STATEMENT IN HIS RADIO FRANCE INTERVIEW (NOUAKCHOTT 1907) THAT HE WOULD NOT RULE OUT DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE POLISARIO AND HIS INSISTENCE THAT, IF THE MAN IN THE STREET WANTS PEACE, HE SHALL HAVE IT, MARK, IT SEEMS TO US, A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN APPROACH ON MAURITANIA'S PART. OULD SALECK'S OBSERVATION TO ME (NOUAKCHOTT 1923 NOTAL) THAT MAURITANIA CANNOT FORCE ANY GROUP, EVEN IF THEY ARE IN FACT MAURITANIANS, TO REMAIN MAURITANIANS AGAINST THEIR WILL ALSO SHOWS A NEW REALISM. FINALLY , THE STATEMENT TO ME BY A PROMINENT MAURITANIAN WHO SPOKE FOR THE REGIME (NOUAKCHOTT 1966 NOTAL) CONCERNING THE ILLEGALITY OF MAURITANIA'S TAKEOVER OF THE SAHARA IN 1975 REPRESENTS A REPUDIATION OF OULD DADDAH'S POLICIES AND, IT SEEMS TO ME, A WILLINGNESS TO EXPLORE ALMOST ANY ROUTE TO SETTLING THE CONFLICT. INDEED, OBSERVERS HERE ARE ALREADY CONCLUDING THAT MAURITANIA INTENDS TO LEAVE ITS PART OF THE SAHARA.

3. FOR THEIR PART, THE ALGERIANS AND POLISARIO WOULD SEEM FROM HERE TO HAVE PLAYED THEIR CARDS CORRECTLY IN ANNOUNCING CEASEFIRE IN MAURITANIAN SECTOR. THE ANNOUNCEMENT GENERALLY VIEWED HERE AS AN EFFORT TO DIVIDE MAURITANIANS AND MOROCCANS, WITH THE FORMER READY TO GRASP AT ANY STRAW IN THEIR DESIRE TO ACHIEVE

PEACE AND THE LATTER STRIVING TO KEEP MAURITANIA IN THE WAR.THE OVERTHROW OF OULD DADDAH HAS APPARENTLY BEEN A GOAL OF ALGERIAN POLICY; NOW THAT THIS HAS COME ABOUT, THE ALGERIANS MAY
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BELIEVE THEIR WAR EFFORT IS SUCCEEDING AND BECOME LESS RECEPTIVE TO NEGOTIATIONS.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ALGERIANS MIGHT REGARD THE COUP AS PROVIDING AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT OF THE WAR WITH A LARGE ENOUGH SLICE OF THE PIE TO MAINTAIN THEIR PRESTIGE. THERE HAS BEEN AMPLE EVIDENCE OF LATE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SEEKING AT LEAST A DIALOGUE WITH THE MOROCCANS, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE REMAINED ADAMANT ON POLISARIO PARTICIPATION IN ANY FUTURE PEACE TALKS, THEY MIGHT BE WILLING TO MATCH THE SORT OF FLEXIBILITY AT WHICH MAURITANIANS NOW HINTING.

5. THIS LEAVES THE MOROCCANS. WITH 9,000 - 12,000 TROOPS IN THIS COUNTRY, THEY WOULD APPEAR TO BE ABLE TO EXERT GREAT INFLUENCE HERE. THE MAURITANIANS ARE OBVIOUSLY FEARFUL THAT THEY WILL TRY TO PUCH THEM AROUND AND PERHAPS COMPROMISE THE CHANCES FOR PEACE. MOROCCAN OFFICIALS HERE HAVE LOST NO OCCASION T ASSERT THEIR CONTINUED MILITANCY IN THE SAHARA WAR; ONE TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT MOROCCAN TROOPS WOULD OCCUPY THE MAURITANIAN PORTION OF THE WESTERN SAHARA SHOULD THE MAURITANIANS ATTEMPT TO WITHDRAW FROM IT. THE SUMMARY DISMASSAL OF MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR BISBIS CAME ABOUT MOST LIKELY

BECAUSE HE WAS NOT SUITED TO THE ROLE OF PROCONSUL (NOUAKCHOTT 2008).

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AMEMBASSY RABAT

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 8, LINE 6)

LONDON FOR SAUNDERS
PARIS FOR MOOSE

6. IN REALITY, HOWEVER, THE MOROCCAN ROOM FOR MAUEUVER SEEMS, FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT, RATHER LIMITED. WERE THE MAURITANIANS TO SUE FOR PEACE, AND PERHAPS WITHDRAW FROM THEIR PART OF THE SAHARA, IT WOULD IN FACT BE QUITE DIFFICULT FOR THE MOROCCANS TO BRING THEIR MILITARY MUSCLE TO BEAR, BECAUSE OF THE DAMAGE THAT SUCH TACTICS WOULD LIKELY DO TO THEIR POLITICAL POSITION. WOULD OPINION WOULD FIND MOROCCAN OCCUPATION OF THE SAHARA DIFFICULT TO COUNTENANCE, AND ANY ATTEMPT AT USING FORCE AGAINST THE MAURITANIANS WOULD SEEM UNTHINKABLE. IT MIGHT BE THAT THE MOROCCANS COULD ENGINEER THE OVERTHROW OF THE OULD SALECK REGIME. HOWEVER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SUCCESSOR REGIME WOULD BE ABLE TO STAND FOR LONG ON A PRO-WAR PLATFORM. MAURITANIA'S BANKRUPTCY, AND THE UNPOPULARITY OF THE WAR HERE, MAKE A HAWKINSH POSITION APPEAR IMPOSSIBLE.

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7. WHATEVER THE CAUSE, MOROCCO'S INITIAL REACTION TO MAURITANIAN SOUNDINGS ON ENDING THE WAR SEEMS FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT TO HAVE BEEN MODERATE. IF TTHE MAURITANIANS ARE TELLING IT LIKE IT WAS KING HASSAN MADE IT APPEAR HE WANTED TALKS AND WOULD TAKE STEPS TO GET THEM STARTED (NOUAKCHOTT 1981). IT SEEMS TO US THAT, BOTH IN HIS TALKS WITH THE MAURITANIANS AND IN HIS PARIS MATCH INTERVIEW, HE COULD HAVE TALKED MUCH TOUGHER THAN HE DID.

8. IF PROSPECTS FOR PEACE, OR AT LEAST FOR PEACE TALKS, IN THE SAHARA ARE NOW GREATER THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE THE CONFLICT BEGAN, TWO SIDES STILL REMAIN FAR APART. THE MAURITANIANS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR IN PRIVATE THAT THEY WILL NOT ACCEPT A POLISARIO-RUN STATE ON THEIR BORDERS, AND HAVE FLOATED INFORMALLY WITH US THE IDEA OF A U.N. TRUSTEESHIP FOR THE SAHARA IN WHICH A REFERENDUM WOULD BE HELD AFTER A NUMBER OF YEARS OF PRESUMABLY MAURITANIAN AND MOROCCAN ADMINISTRATION. WE DOUBT THAT THE ALGERIANS AND THE POLISARIO WOULD AGREE TO SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT AT THIS TIME.

9. IN THIS SITUATION, IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR US TO SEEK TO PLAY A MEDIATORY ROLE. THE MAURITANIANS THEMSELVES HAVE ALREADY DISCARDED THIS IDEA. WE NOTE FROM PARIS 22441 THAT THE QUAI D'ORSAY AGREES WITH ITS AMBASSADOR HERE THAT FRANCE IS NOT IN A GOOD POSTITION TO CONDUCT A MEDIATION (NOUAKCOTT 1998). WE WOULD ADD THE COMMENT THAT, AS A PROMINENT MAURITANIAN HAS SUGGESTED, THE FRENCH COULD PERHAPS SERVE AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN MAURITANIA AND MOROCCO. WE ALS WONDER ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF SPAIN AS A GO-BETWEEN GIVEN THE CURRENT PARLOUS STATE OF SPANISH-ALGERIAN RELATIONS. IN OUR VIEW, THE SAUDIS REMAIN THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR THE JOB.

10. NEVERTHELESS, WITHOUT IN ANY WAY SEEKING TO MEDIATE, IT WOULD SEEM A
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GOOD IDEA FOR US TO SOUND OUT THE MOROCCAN AND ALGERIAN POSITIONS IN DETAIL, TO COMMUNICATE TO THEM OUR FEELING THAT THE MAURITANIANS ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN GETTING PEACE TALKS STARTED, AND PERHAPS TO MENTION OUR HOPE THAT NEGOTIATIONS COULD BEGIN SOON. IN THE PAST, THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT HAVE SOUGHT OUR GOOD OFFICES ONLY A MEANS OF ADVANCING THEIR POLITICAL CAUSES. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THERE MAY BE A BIT OF COMMON GROUND, AND IT WOULD SEEM IN OUR INTEREST THAT THIS SITUATION BE EXPLOITED. KRYZA

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